

RESEARCH OUTPUTS / RÉSULTATS DE RECHERCHE

Foreword

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The Mercator Network of Language Diversity Centres



Annual Report 2009

Language Education



**Mercator Network of Language Diversity Centres
Annual Report 2009 – Language Education**

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Foreword

In the past decade the European Commission has put considerable effort in shaping a coherent language policy for the EU under the flag of multilingualism. In this respect it has published two official communications: *A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism* (COM(2005) 596 final) and *Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment* (COM(2008) 566 final). The 2005 communication, i.e. the first Commission communication that explores multilingualism as a policy area, favours the idea of setting up a European network of "Language Diversity Centres". Where possible, the network should build on existing structures. In the years following the 2005 communication this idea has taken shape through the creation of funding lines that aim at supporting networks such as the Mercator Network of Language Diversity Centres, a network that was launched in 2009.

Besides the formerly EU-funded Mercator Centres in Ljouwert/Leeuwarden, Barcelona and Aberystwyth the Mercator Network also incorporates the Research Institute for Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Science (located in Budapest) and Mälardalen University's Centre for Finnish Studies (located in Eskilstuna). With the Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning (Ljouwert/Leeuwarden) as a leading partner, the Mercator Network is intended to be a platform for the exchange of research results, information, experience and good practice in the field of language learning and linguistic diversity. The resolution that was drafted at the occasion of the network's first meeting on the 5th of March 2009, the network's first annual report and an active participation in some of the network's activities allow for the following general characterisation of the network's guiding principles:

- the Mercator Network aims for an inclusive approach to multilingualism and linguistic diversity

Although each of the partners shows a special interest for European autochthonous minority languages and the network states the importance of the recognition of these languages in scientific research in the European Union, the scope of the Mercator Network is all but limited to autochthonous minority languages. Next to autochthonous minority languages, the network also embraces immigrant languages, sign languages and national languages as being essential parts of the European language mosaic. The network wants to take the interplay between the different constituents of multilingual reality as a starting point to fuel multidimensional and multidisciplinary reflexions on future (supra)national and regional language policy and planning initiatives in Europe. In doing so, it acts in line with the vision expressed in the European Commission's communications on multilingualism, the final report of the High Level Group on Multilingualism and the language policy documents of the Council of Europe.

- the Mercator Network emphasizes the importance of language learning inside and outside of formal settings as a prerequisite for the advancement of the individual multilingualism of the EU-citizens and as a prerequisite for the maintenance of the EU's linguistic diversity

Being aware of the EU's general language learning objective (mother tongue + 2) and the importance of the concept of lifelong learning for the advancement of the European knowledge economy, the Mercator Network investigates and calls for an investigation of ways to optimize (the organization of) language learning and multilingual education in formal educational settings and to optimize (the organization of) teacher training in respect of language learning and multilingual education in formal educational settings. The network partners, however, also comply with the sociolinguistic maxim that schools alone can neither be made responsible for raising the individual multilingualism of European citizens, nor for the continuation of societal multilingualism through ensuring the so-called intergenerational mother-tongue transmission in minority language communities. As a consequence, they also stress the need for and are involved in research on best practices in the field of language learning outside of formal education.

- the Mercator Network scrutinizes the role of language as a factor in the creation of social cohesion, as a factor contributing to economic prosperity and as a factor that is constitutive of multiple (i.e. European, national, regional, local) identities

Through addressing the role of language as related to social cohesion and prosperity the Mercator Network in a constructive way wants to discuss the linkage between the European Commission's policy on multilingualism and linguistic diversity and the central objectives of the Lisbon strategy. On the one hand, the goal of this discussion is to gain a better insight in the mechanisms through which languages as typical social constructs do, could or should try to contribute to the realization of the Lisbon objectives. On the other hand, this discussion allows for a better consideration of these mechanisms in language policy and planning initiatives at various levels. In the same vein, the network partners also question the role of language in the crystallization of multiple identities as promoted by the European Union as it stresses unity in diversity.

- the Mercator Network actively stimulates the participation of junior upcoming researchers, policy makers, language professionals and representatives of immigrant, minority and majority language groups in the network's activities in order to assure an adequate transfer of knowledge, expertise and research results and to help raise linguistic awareness on as many societal levels as possible

The Mercator Network not only functions as a platform (or: a hub) for the partners involved in the network. It also takes care to involve members of the active networks of each of the partners in the network activities, makes sure to strengthen the ties with other EC-funded networks on linguistic diversity (such as NPLD, the Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity) and invites policy makers and language professionals as well as language group representatives to network activities. Special care is taken of the transfer of knowledge and expertise to young(er) people active in the field of multilingualism and linguistic diversity. The reason behind this is that precisely these people bank on the future and are a precious link in spreading the message that individual and societal multilingualism are normal phenomena that are part of the way of life of many European citizens.

Even though the Mercator Network has only been running for one year now, it can already present a track-record that clearly shows that the partners succeed in meeting up to the original intention of the network. Active at the forefront of the European research on individual as well as societal aspects of multilingualism, the network's partners jointly contribute in a most constructive way to the advancement of a coherent European language policy.

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